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USAID FOR DCHA SUDAN TEAM, AF/EA, DCHA
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SUBJECT: WEST DARFUR - ZALINGEI UPDATE

REF: KHARTOUM 0320

Summary and Comment

11. In mid-February, a USAID Darfur Field Office (DFO) protection officer visited Zalingei in West Darfur. Zalingei town has generally been calm throughout the Darfur crisis, although the Zalingei "corridor," which includes Garsila and Mukjar (septel), was the site of brutal janjaweed attacks in 2004. Conflict between Arab tribes north of Zalingei since December 2005 is a troubling development that has resulted in the establishment of an Arab internally displaced persons (IDP) camp in Zalingei town. In addition, in February 2006, staff from two Scandinavian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) withdrew from the area due to fallout over the Danish cartoon controversy. (Note: The agencies have since returned. End note.) NGOs in Zalingei noted that local authorities continue to place restrictions on protection programs, and that there is no sign that relations will improve between the humanitarian community and the government. Limited USAID funding at this writing will force some NGOs to lay off staff and reduce programs, sending an unintended message that the international community is losing interest in the plight of conflict-affected Darfurians.

12. Tensions between the Arab and non-Arab IDP groups are high, and relations between the displaced population and the government are strained over the question of African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) rehatting and the investigative work of the International Criminal Court (ICC). The situation may become more confrontational in Zalingei. End summary and comment.

Humanitarian Overview of Zalingei

13. USAID visited Zalingei town in mid-February to obtain an update on the humanitarian and protection situation. Zalingei town has been largely quiet throughout the Darfur war, although human rights groups extensively documented janjaweed killings of members of African tribes and concentration camp-like settings in 2004 at sites along the Zalingei corridor, which includes Garsila

and Mukjar. A USAID team recently visited this area and will report septel.

14. According to U.N. Humanitarian Profile Number 22, as of January 1, more than 120,000 affected persons lived in Zalingei locality. That figure included approximately 64,000 IDPs in Zalingei town. However, mid-February figures from the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the NGO CARE International reveal a current total IDP population of at least 82,000 split among several camps: Hassa Hissa camp, population 38,000; Hamidiya camp, population 27,000; Khamsa Degaig camp, population 13,000; and Taiba camp, population estimated to be approximately 4,000.

15. Taiba was spontaneously formed in December 2005 and currently has a population of approximately 4,000 Arab IDPs. The government has authorized a USAID partner NGO to create some camp facilities, such as child-friendly spaces. Another USAID partner is serving as the camp coordinator, although it does not wish to retain that role permanently. In spite of these activities, the government does not consider Taiba to be a "camp" and refuses to officially recognize it as such. The government anticipates the early return of Taiba's IDPs; however, the humanitarian community does not see indications of this possibility. According to the U.N. Mission in Sudan (UNMIS), government-led local reconciliation efforts were unsuccessful in Nyangadulo, the site of the inter-Arab clashes that led to the displacement of the IDPs in Taiba camp.

16. Tensions exist between Taiba camp, which contains Arab Bani Halba and Hotoia IDPs, and the other Zalingei

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camps, which mostly contain non-Arab Fur, Masalit, and Zaghawa IDPs. According to NGO partners, the IDPs from the three pre-existing camps of Zalingei resent NGOs for providing comparable services to the Arab IDPs. In addition, during the USAID DFO protection officer's visit, a campaign had begun, with anti-government messages such as "Yes to prosecution of Bashir," and "Yes to international intervention in Darfur," scrawled on the walls of NGO and U.N. compounds. Tensions in Zalingei could worsen over political issues, including the AMIS rehatting to a U.N. force, and the work of the ICC.

17. According to OCHA, 15 NGOs and 12 U.N. agencies operate in Zalingei locality. The humanitarian presence in Zalingei has grown since early January, when the U.N. relocated humanitarian personnel from El Geneina and northwest West Darfur to comply with Phase IV security restrictions in those areas. Staff from the U.N. Population Fund (UNFPA) and the U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF) have been re-assigned from Zalingei to El Geneina, and staff from UNMIS and the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) previously assigned to El Geneina are temporarily operating out of Zalingei.

18. Humanitarian agencies have largely met the humanitarian needs of the affected population in Zalingei. Humanitarian Profile Number 22 showed coverage gaps of less than 10 percent in the food, shelter, sanitation, primary health, and nutrition sectors in and around Zalingei town. However, a coverage gap of 30 percent existed for the provision of clean water.

19. In early February 2006, the NGOs Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) and Danish Refugee Council (DRC) evacuated Zalingei as a result of direct threats during the fallout over the publication of the cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohamed (reftel). NCA provides nutrition services, and DRC is UNHCR's main partner implementing protection programs. Although these agencies have resumed working in Zalingei,

the lasting effects of the incidents are still unknown.
(Comment: The consensus among international actors in Zalingei is that authorities have sought to restrict the activities of the international community for some time, and that the furor over the Prophet Mohamed cartoons provided an opportunity to manufacture security incidents that would force the NGOs to leave. End comment.)

Protection Programs

¶10. UNHCR is the lead agency on protection, and USAID partners and humanitarian agencies report that coordination among humanitarian actors has been good. However, local Humanitarian Affairs Commission (HAC) representatives have pressured USAID partners working in the area not to engage in protection programming, and equate protection with spying on the government or politicizing issues to turn IDPs against the government. Partners therefore carry out programs under other names, such as livelihoods, water and sanitation, healthcare (not women's health), and coordination.

¶11. In spite of the government's stance towards protection, the HAC approved the opening of a joint International Rescue Committee (IRC) and U.N. Development Program (UNDP) Rule of Law center in Zalingei. The humanitarian community hopes that through this program some protection issues can be quietly addressed.

¶12. Agencies implementing protection programs in Zalingei reported that some of the least successful income-generation activities, such as henna production, were the most popular among IDP women. One USAID partner postulates that these activities actually had a far greater psychosocial benefit than economic benefit, and that the psychosocial benefits caused women to participate in the program. The partner reported that personal interaction with other women in a safe, friendly environment appeared to assist women who had been raped. As a result, survivors regained a degree of self-esteem

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and benefited from an intimacy and contact with others. The USAID partner reported that they are working to improve the income-generation portion of women's programs while maintaining the psychosocial benefits women derive from participation. Marketing and market assessments incorporated into the programs are being strengthened with the goal of increasing women's abilities to choose safer alternatives to food and fuel collection.

¶13. Comment: The Zalingei corridor was one of the last areas that the NGO community served. For a long time Medecins sans Frontieres-Holland was the only NGO operating in the area, but has since handed over most activities to international NGOs. The USAID Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) funds most NGOs operating in the corridor and in Zalingei town. The limited funding currently available for Darfur will force NGOs in this area to reduce activities and lay off staff, and will send an unintended message that the international community is losing interest in the humanitarian plight of Darfurians.

WHITAKER